

Feed More Kids for School Lunch Success:

Place and Promotion

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and
Promotion*



You can get more kids to eat at school and earn more money for your program! Read how it is being done in some California schools. Better marketing can help. Just use the four Ps to plan how

you can do it, too: Product, Price, Place, and Promotion. This brochure is designed to help improve the **place** and **promotion** of your school meals to draw in more customers.

What are your big dreams for the school meals you offer? Make a plan and work with others so you can make these dreams come true. Start with small changes and soon you will have made a big change!

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Make School a Nice Place to Eat Meals

The appeal of eating areas can make or break a student's decision to eat at school. From paint and lighting to seating and sound, small changes can go a long way toward making eating areas more inviting.

MYTH

We need more money to upgrade our cafeteria.

FACT

You can perk up school eating areas in simple and creative ways using the money you have and other local resources.

- **Involve students and staff.**

Can art students paint a mural? Can shop students build something useful? Can business students help raise money? Get students, parents, interested teachers, and maintenance staff involved.

- **Seek local help.**

Will a shade structure or better tables expand and improve eating space? Businesses and volunteers (parents and others) are often willing to donate materials, funds, or time for one-time improvements.

Example: Staff teamed up with students to transform the serving and eating areas of middle schools in the Moreno Valley Unified School District. They chose a theme for each cafeteria, such as the beach or a school mascot. The food service program hired a local artist to paint murals. To go with each theme, staff chose new uniforms and bought simple props, such as baskets,

to display food. And they made all these changes within their regular program budget. More students are now eager to eat at school.

Serve Meals in More Places on Campus

Students often have little time to buy and eat lunch. Take your high-quality food—as full meals—to places where students can get it quickly. Serving reimbursable meals at every point of service will also erase differences between “free” and “paid” lines.

MYTH

Long lines are just a fact of life in school food service.

FACT

You can speed up lunch service and serve more students if you set up more points of service and offer full meals at every point.

- **Speed it up.**

Use speed lines, mobile carts, multiple windows, salad bars, food courts, grab-n-go, and even vending machines to help with faster service.

- **Get the gear and the help you need.**

Maybe you can just “rearrange the furniture” to make better use of equipment. Or have student workers help with some staffing needs. If you also offer school breakfast and a summer food service program, apply for start-up and expansion grants to get money for equipment.

- **Get the word out.**

Advertise each new lunch option and add location. If you tell students about their options in advance, they can choose more quickly at the point of service.



Example: At Hiram Johnson High School in the Sacramento City Unified School District, food service staff found solutions to meal service on its large campus. Bought with money from a few small grants, new food carts placed around campus allowed students to get a full meal without walking far. And when new tables were added to a courtyard, the tension in the cafeteria eased because students had more space in which to eat.

Keep Students on Campus

Quality school meals can help students do well in school. More students will benefit from these meals if the campus is closed at lunchtime. In addition, keeping more kids on campus all day reduces violence and drug problems on and off campus. It also means you have more students to serve.

MYTH

Our principal will never agree to a closed campus.

FACT

Many principals who understand the need for quality school lunches and the other benefits of a closed campus policy have convinced their staff to adopt and implement the policy at middle and high schools.

• Educate others.

Tell your principals, teachers, and parents how healthy children learn better and how school meals can help.

• Plan as a team.

Before making any change, get planning help from everyone who will be affected:



students, nutrition staff, custodians, and teachers.

• Be flexible.

When a campus is first closed, try to think of possible problems and be ready with creative solutions when they arise.

Example: In 2003 the Vacaville Unified School District school board closed a high school campus at lunchtime. Faced with this change, the food service director met with students to hear about their needs. She learned that they left campus to find more food choices, shorter lines, and a nicer place to eat. Staff, students, and a consultant worked together to expand school food choices and decide how to improve the campus eating areas. Students now have many ethnic menu choices and eat at bright tables under an outdoor shelter. And the nutrition program has many more (and happier!) customers.

Promote Meals to Students and Parents

What makes your school lunch so great? You decide, then tell the world! To attract new customers

and boost the school lunch image, you can convince students and parents that school lunch meets their needs: it's fresh, modern, attractive, tasty, convenient, nutritious, and affordable.

MYTH

School lunch does not deserve the bad rap it gets, but we can't compete with fast food.

FACT

You can use regular, upbeat, and frequent marketing messages—just like the pros do—to tell students and others about your great meal program.

• Spread your message.

Choose a slogan and repeat it everywhere you can. Get students' attention with eye-catching, colorful signs in the cafeteria and around campus. Stay simple and low cost (ask the art class to help).

• Visit your competitors.

What draws students and their families to restaurants off campus? Focus on those ideas when promoting your school meal program.

• Stage "theme" days or weeks.

Offer students rewards to try new menu items. Get students to help design and stage these events.

• Get published.

Use newsletters or your school Web site to show simple, understandable lunch facts, such as average number of calories, number of menu choices, or the cost comparison to a sack lunch.

Examples: Bakersfield City Schools use their slogan, “Reach Your Peak with School Lunch,” on their Web site and menus, in parent newsletters, and so forth. Manteca Unified School District announces on its delivery trucks that nutrition services is “serving over 2 million healthy meals a year.” New York City Schools use the phrase, “Feed Your Mind,” on signs and menus and during cafeteria promotions.

Talk to Your Customers

To succeed, every business talks to its customers—your customers just happen to be students and parents. Every child and parent has an opinion. Your business is to meet their needs in the education setting. When students and parents take an active role in choosing food options, they value school meals and encourage others to eat at school.

MYTH

Young students cannot give helpful feedback about school food.

FACT

You can make students of all ages happier with school meals if you ask students, parents, and staff to help plan and evaluate your program.

- **Survey students.**

Talk with students in each grade group to understand better what they need and want. Ask Nutrition Advisory Council student members to survey their peers and help with taste tests. And let students of all ages help plan menus.



- **Inform parents.**

Parents are your customers, too, because they often decide whether their child will eat school meals or not. Talk with them to find out what they value.

- **Give great customer service.**

Workers who smile, look sharp, serve meals quickly, ask students to try new foods, and show that they care about their customers sell the most meals. Give staff the training and support they need to do their best.

- **Don't forget your school team.**

Principals and other school staff are your customers and partners, too. They can work as part of your team to make sure school meals are served quickly, in a friendly way, and in a nice place. Keep them up-to-date in staff meetings, newsletters, and other ways.

Example: In the Ventura Unified School District, staff members visit all 17 elementary schools monthly to introduce new foods. Students taste and discuss the food. Parents love these taste tests because their children

often ask to eat the fresh food at home, too. A staff newsletter also highlights new menu options and other important news every month.

Resources

- *A Menu Planner for Healthy School Meals*. FNS 303. Chapter 8: Marketing Your Product. United States Department of Agriculture, 1998, pp. 203–18. <http://teamnutrition.usda.gov/Resources/menuplanner.html>
- Bakersfield City School District (661) 631-4733 <http://www.bcsd.com/foodservices/>
- Moreno Valley Unified School District Linda Hayes, (951) 571-7500, ext. 17267
- Sacramento City Unified School District Nancy Magaña-Alexander, (916) 277-6710
- Ventura Unified School District Sandy Van Houten, (805) 641-5000, ext. 1301



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